J. Coles
Secret Devotion
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THE

CIRCULAR LETTER

FROM THE

MINISTERS AND MESSENGERS

OF THE

BAPTIST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES,

by J. Coles

STATEDLY MEETING

At ALCESTER, Warwickshire; BOURTON on the Water, CAMPDEN, and FAIRFORD, Gloucestershire; OXFORD, BURFORD, CHIPPING-NORTON, COAT, and WITNEY, Oxfordshire; and SHIPSTON upon Stour, Worcestershire:

Receiving the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as their only guide in faith and practice; and thence deriving their belief in the important doctrines of Three Equal Persons in the Divine Essence—Eternal and Personal Election—Original Sin—Particular Redemption—Free Justification by the Imputed Righteousness of Christ—Efficacious Grace in Regeneration—The final Perseverance of Believers—the Resurrection of the dead—The last Judgment—The everlasting punishment of the Impenitent, and happiness of the Righteous:

ASSEMBLED AT WITNEY, MAY 23d & 24th, 1809:

TO THE SEVERAL CHRISTIAN SOCIETIES WHICH THEY REPRESENT.

OXFORD:
PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. BARTLETT.
1809.

CIRCULAR LETTER, &c.

DEAR BRETHREN,

OUR annual communications have hitherto been calculated to awaken and cherish the warmest sentiments of gratitude and praise. Each former year has witnessed the increase of our numbers and our joy; but, as appears by the statement annexed, our combined interest has, during the past year, suffered a decrease. Nor is this the circumstance most to be lamented; the associate churches in general appear to be in a very declining state, and *the love of many*, we fear, *has waxed cold*. Surely it becomes us, Brethren, to enquire, whether the Lord hath not *a controversy with his people?* and to pray, that he will *shew us wherefore he contendeth with us*. Nevertheless, *our God hath not utterly forsaken us*, nor hath he *forgotten to be gracious*. Our minds have been greatly relieved, and our hopes much encouraged, by the consideration, that *the kingdom is the Lord's, and* that *he is the governor among the nations*. The public services were well attended, and highly interesting; we hope that impressions were made, which will prove very salutary in their effects, and that our exertions in the cause of Christ will receive a renewed stimulus; so that both ministers and private Christians may *abound in the work of the Lord*, and be able, in reference to all the efforts of benevolence, to say, *the love of Christ constraineth us*. Be importunate, Brethren, at a throne of grace, that it may please God to change the mournful scene, which this part of his vineyard presents, and to turn our sorrows into joy.

The subject of the following Letter is well suited to your present circumstances. *Secret devotion* is the foundation of individual piety, and consequently affords the best support to religious exertions in every relative character which we sustain. Our earnest prayer is, that, in every *labour of love*, *God himself, even our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, may direct* and succeed our labours amongst you. *And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do towara you.*

you. That you, Brethren, may with the greater effect unite with us in these supplications, we request your serious attention to a few remarks *On the principal hindrances to Closet Devotion; with the best means of their removal.*

It is an affecting thought, that so many millions of rational and immortal beings, through a long succession of ages, should have lived and died without the knowledge of *the only living and true God.* And it is still more affecting to consider, that among the comparatively few who have obtained this knowledge, through the medium of divine revelation, there should have always been such a small proportion, who have entertained becoming views of the being and perfections of God, and evinced that their knowledge was influential, by its producing proper effects on their dispositions and conduct. There are multitudes, alas! by whom the doctrine of the divine Existence is acknowledged, who seem to think, that such a general belief is quite sufficient, for they habitually live as if there were no God; *they cast off fear, and restrain prayer before him.* There are others, whose worship is mere pretence and form; they *draw near unto God with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him;* they have *a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof.* Some, however, there are, who worship God as a spirit, *in spirit and in truth,* who approach him through the only appointed medium, his dear Son, *the Mediator beteen God and man,* and under the sacred influences of *the Holy Spirit given to them.* These cannot forsake *the assembling of themselves together* for *public* worship, nor can they be satisfied with the bare external performance of it, if their hearts are not engaged: on the *family* altar they daily offer the sacrifices of prayer and praise, and realize the presence of the God of Bethel; they know and feel, likewise, that *secret* worship is both an important duty, and an inestimable privilege. The examples of the servants of God in all ages, the express injunction and frequent practice of their divine Lord himself, with the ample encouragement he has graciously afforded, carry irresistible conviction to their minds, that *closet devotion* is sanctioned by the highest authority, and enforced by the strongest recommendations; it cannot, therefore, be habitually neglected, nor lightly esteemed by any true Christians. When we assign it this name, we scarcely need say, that it is merely expressive of the *secret* nature of such devotional exercises; we hereby confine them to no particular place, for this must be determined by circumstances;

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it may be a private room of the house, or any retired spot in the fields.

It were easy to enlarge on the peculiar advantages attending secret devotion: suffice it to say, that it forms the principal, though not the exclusive, channel of communication between heaven and earth, between God and the soul. While the language of the Poet may be, with propriety, applied to public and social prayer, it is especially applicable to the devotion of the closet, and the happy experience of all real Christians will be found to verify it;

> Pray'r ardent opens heav'n, lets down a stream
> Of glory on the consecrated hour
> Of man, in audience with the Deity.
> Who worships the great God, that moment joins
> The first in heav'n, and sets his foot on hell.

Mr. Orton, in his life of the eminently pious Doddridge, says; "He reckoned a serious and diligent care in the per- "formance of secret prayer, an evidence and support of real "religion; and strongly recommended it to others, as a most "powerful incentive to every duty, and the best relief under "the fatigues and afflictions of life. Thus he addressed one "of his brethren: 'As prayer is the food and breath of all practical religion, so secret prayer in particular is of vast 'importance: insomuch that I verily believe, that if a man 'were to keep a particular and accurate journal of his own 'heart, but for one month, he would find as real and exact a 'correspondence between the temper of his soul at the seasons 'of secret devotion, and in other parts of his life, as we find 'between the changes of the barometer and the weather."

"How shameful, (says a living author,) to make our public "business an excuse for the neglect of retirement; when the "greater the pressure and publicity of affairs, the more impe- "riously they demand that exercise in which we derive grace "to honour God openly. This holds still stronger, if our "public employment be to minister in the church of God. "To slight the closet, in order to prepare for the pulpit, is as "if the High Priest, in his haste to bless the people, had neg- "lected to burn incense within the veil, and to sprinkle on "the mercy-seat that blood, which gave efficacy to his bene- "diction. When our Lord found his time filled up in "preaching and healing all the day, rather than neglect it, "he spent all night in prayer to God."

Happy indeed would the servants of God be, whether ministers

isters, or private Christians, if there were nothing to obstruct and diminish the benign influence of secret devotion on their minds; to prevent the reception and enjoyment of those rich and unnumbered blessings, of which it is the chief medium of conveyance! they would then uniformly rise superior to all the hostile efforts of their spiritual adversaries, and to all the multiplied difficulties which attend their progress to glory. The constant communication of gracious, seasonable, and all sufficient supplies from heaven, would enable them to go on their way rejoicing, and perpetually, as they advanced, to grow stronger and stronger. But, alas! closet devotion is frequently obstructed; the hindrances are neither few nor small; and our present object, dear Brethren, is, with a view to your spirtual benefit, to consider the nature of this obstruction, to point out the chief causes of it, and to suggest the means best adapted to their removal.

Secret devotion may be hindered as to *the periods of its observance.* All seasons are, in some respects, alike to God; the most regular attendance on this duty may dwindle into formality, and ought, by no means, to supersede occasional ejaculations; yet such stated times, appropriated to devotional exercises, are sanctioned by Scripture examples, and evidently attended with peculiar advantages. If you have no fixed periods for secret prayer, you will very probably often find no time at all; and in the course of a year, there will be many days, when at most you will only present a few hurried petitions. Is there not reason to apprehend, that this is frequently the case among professors of religion? Occasional periods of leisure occur to almost every person, and afford a number of favourable opportunites for devotional retirement; if you feel no disposition to improve such occasions to this sacred purpose, it may be expected, that a variety of circumstances will sometimes so interfere with the stated periods you may have appropriated to it, as that it will be in great measure, if not altogether, neglected.

The devotions of the closet may be obstructed in reference to *the general nature and tenor of the petitions you present in them.* Many persons complain that they want matter in prayer; their abilities, they say, are so small, that they are unable satisfactorily to express themselves. There may be some propriety in this statement, with respect to *social* prayer, though objections against engaging in this duty are often raised without sufficient cause; and, without any breach

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of christian candour, it may be affirmed, that they frequently result from prevailing carnality, or false shame. In *secret* prayer, however, these objections have no force; and if the want of suitable matter be here felt, the deficiency may be easily accounted for. The influence which the habitual disposition of your hearts will have on your devotions, will be found exceedingly great, and the matter of your prayers will uniformly correspond with it. Prayer implies a sense of need, and is the offering up of your desires to God, that your need may be supplied, *according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus*; your wants are various and numerous, the blessings, therefore, to be solicited are so likewise. Now, if you are careless about ascertaining what your necessities are, and having your hearts duly affected with them, you will go to the throne of grace almost without an errand; or will satisfy yourselves with merely presenting some customary, general petitions, not at all expressive of your real wants, nor appropriate to your actual situation.

The hindrances to closet devotion may more directly affect the *spirit* of it. There is a wide difference between true prayer, and the mere *saying* of prayers. You well know, that the latter is often done by those who are entire strangers to the former. Prayer does not consist in the number, nor in the arrangement of the petitions presented, but in the spirit of the petitioner. The matter may be unexceptionable in itself, when it does not proceed from the sincere desires of the heart; thus the hypocritical and profane often pronounce excellent forms of prayer, and yet never pray in sincerity: yea, even true Christians themselves may at seasons merely pray in word, while their hearts are far from being engaged in devotion. Your prayers may be totally devoid of contrition for sin and faith in Christ: and what is prayer, without these, but an empty sound? without these, religious worship of any kind has but the *name* of devotion, and that it does not deserve. Although, then, you observe proper seasons, and employ suitable petitions, your secret devotions may be, in this respect, effectually obstructed.

The *pleasure* resulting from secret devotion may be prevented. Many view religion altogether, and consequently all devotional exercises, as irksome and disagreeable, and therefore totally neglect them. Others only attend to public and social services, in order to pacify conscience, to gratify spiritual pride, to recommend themselves, as they imagine, to

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the divine Being, or to obtain the good opinion of their fellow creatures. Such persons may observe the forms even of secret worship, but they feel no delight of a spiritual kind, and know nothing of the refined pleasures of genuine devotion. Real Christians, on the contrary, have a sacred delight in communion with God, and longing desires after its increase: in the devotions of the closet they peculiarly enjoy this communion, when they are enabled to draw nigh unto their God and Father in Christ Jesus, *with a true heart, and in the full assurance of faith.* But too often, alas! it is otherwise; the understanding is dark, the imagination wandering, the affections carnal, the whole mind confused and bewildered; the engagements of the closet, which were wont to afford the sweetest enjoyment, thus prove a burdensome task.

The devotions of the closet may be hindered as to their *success.* Happy is it for you, Brethren, when in the actual reception of those blessings you solicit in your retired moments, you have the most decisive proof, that your prayers have gone up with acceptance before God, offered on that altar *which sanctifieth the gift!* but, are there not other periods, when you seem to pray in vain? Your God *covereth himself with a cloud, that your prayer should not pass through;* you go again and again to the footstool of mercy, and still your suit is denied; you appear to be as far from possessing the blessings you went to implore as ever. Sometimes, doubtless, God refuses to answer your prayers, because you know not what you ask; to withhold the things you request, he sees will be more for your good, than to grant them: at other times, it forms a part of his parental discipline; he designs it both as a punishment of your sins, and as the means of bringing you to repentance; or *you ask and receive not, because you ask amiss.*

Since then it is evident, that closet devotion, highly important and beneficial as it is, may be thus variously obstructed, it is surely of importance to ascertain, what are the chief causes of hindrance, which so banefully operate. These differ according to persons' different situations, circumstances, habits, temptations: we can only specify some of those which are most general, and most injurious.

Your retired devotion may be hindered, from *the want of wisdom and resolution in the management of it.* Although you may set apart stated portions of time for secret worship, if

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you fix on improper seasons, as for instance, when your secular concerns have pre-engaged your attention in the morning, and after your spirits are quite exhausted, and all your energy is gone in the evening, you need not wonder if you feel but little interest in it, and derive but little advantage from it. Or, though the seasons may be suitable, yet if you have not sufficient firmness to make a point of the devotional employment of them, as far as circumstances will permit, but, from your not carefully redeeming your time, and prudently ordering your affairs, they are very frequently infringed upon; if you suffer slight excuses to satisfy you in surrendering those portions of time to other objects; if you cannot withstand trifling intrusions, and the evil of protracted visits; the sacred purposes, for which they were intended, must necessarily be prevented, and thus serious loss and injury will be sustained.

Obstructions to secret devotion are frequently found to arise from *a lukewarm, indifferent, stupid state of mind.* Have you not felt, Brethren, the fatal effects of its prevalence? Hence, we fear, secret duties have sometimes been altogether omitted, and when observed, have been nothing more than merely formal exercises. When you have entered into your closets, to *pray to your father who seeth in secret*, you have been destitute of all becoming emotions; you have had no deep impression of the divine majesty and glory, no believing regard to the mediation of Jesus Christ, no humbling views of yourselves, no lively perception of the value of divine blessings, no spiritual affections, nor ardent desires; secret prayer, therefore, has excited no interest; an awful stupor has deadened your feelings, and precluded your enjoyment of any of those pleasures which are really attached to the service of God; you could not present the prayer of faith, nor properly feel either for yourselves or others.

In *the predominance of evil dispositions and unsubdued corruptions*, you will find another obstacle to the devotions of the closet. If, instead of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, dispositions quite the reverse gain the ascendancy; it is utterly impossible, that secret duties should be performed either with comfort or advantage. Pride, envy, wrath, malice, prejudice, and all other diabolical dispositions, are totally inconsistent with a devotional spirit; they will either occasion the entire omission of secret prayer, or totally unfit for performing it

aright; hence St. Paul says, *I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.* If any secret lust lie concealed, if any evil propensity be cherished, if any sin be held too dear to be sacrificed, your prayers are but a solemn mockery of God, and an abomination in his sight. *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*

The pressure of worldly cares forms another very powerful and frequent hindrance to closet devotion. Few indeed have attained the desirable acquisition, of being both *diligent in business, and fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.* The cares of this life, too often, not only choak the seed of the word, but suppress the spirit of prayer. Our Lord saw it necessary, in his salutary caution, to connect prevalent carnality with the grosser acts of sensual indulgence, as alike fatal to our immortal interests. *Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.* How can it be expected, that the duties of the closet should be properly observed, where persons are so fully engaged in worldly pursuits, and so overwhelmed in worldly cares, as that their first thoughts in the morning, and their last at night, are occupied by them, and their whole souls engaged in them through the day? They have scarcely a leisure hour, and when they have, deem it necessary to recruit their exhausted spirits in company, or in recreations. O Brethren! suffer the word of admonition. Beware, lest your secret devotions should be awfully obstructed by the inordinate love and pursuit of this present evil world!

The influence of a variety of powerful temptations is often such as greatly to obstruct devotional retirement. The *cares* of the world form only one, out of a vast number of channels, through which temptations flow; its *pleasures* also are very ensnaring, and often successful in drawing the heart from God; both its *smiles* and its *frowns* are opposed to the life of true devotion: among its *company* are frequently to be found those, who make it their business to allure from the path of duty, and thus occassion criminal omissions. Even pious characters themselves may injudiciously prove a source of temptation, and detain you in society, when you ought to be alone with God. *Satan* is peculiarly hostile to secret prayer, where he has reason to believe it sincere; against it, therefore, all his arts and energy are maliciously directed; he em-

employs a variety of expedients with this object in view, and too frequently successful ones; he will, if possible, prevent it altogether, and if he cannot do this, will unfit for it, assault in it, and discourage after it;

> For Satan trembles, when he sees
> The weakest saint upon his knees.

All these, and various other temptations, prevail the more, from meeting a corrupt nature, a deceitful heart within yourselves, ever ready to give them additional strength, to render them more formidable, and almost ensure at least their partial success.

Once more, *the accusations of a guilty conscience* form a frequent hindrance to closet devotion. Where there is a consciousness of any species of allowed immorality, it is impossible there should be habitual liberty in prayer. The allowance of any sin, or the omission of any known duty, will be certainly felt to produce a baneful influence on secret duties, and obstruct the pleasure and improvement they might otherwise yield. This obstruction is painfully experienced, in some degree, by the most eminent saints. It is sin which separates between God and the soul, and causes him to hide his face. It is when engaged in secret prayer, that conscience will be most likely to execute its office, and produce its just and salutary charges, so that you are ashamed and confounded, till you obtain a fresh discovery of pardoning mercy. *If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.*

Having thus reviewed some of the principal hindrances to closet devotion, it only remains, that we briefly suggest the means best calculated to remove them.

Let secret prayer be always, if possible, preceded by reading the Scriptures, meditation, and self scrutiny. Keep thy foot when thou goest into thy closet, lest thou present the sacrifice of fools, for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God. *The Bible* ought ever to be your closet companion, the perusal of it, and especially of its devotional parts, will prove the best means of preparing your minds for secret communion with God. Let not a slight, hasty, cursory perusal of the Scriptures satisfy, but read them with seriousness, attention, and desire that you may properly

understand and feel their import. *Meditate* on what you read, in order that the important truths, the salutary precepts, the precious promises, the solemn admonitions, contained in the Word of God, may make a deep impression, and be turned into fervent prayer. A few verses only, thus carefully read and improved, will be beneficial; whereas whole chapters might be read without reflection, and consequently without advantage. As a further preparative for devotion, *examine yourselves;* enquire into your state, your obligations, your progress or decline in the path of holiness; call to mind your actual sins, your criminal neglects; endeavour to ascertain your greatest dangers, your peculiar necessities; thus would you, probably, approach your heavenly Father in a becoming spirit, grateful, humble, contrite, dependant, importunate; thus would you more strongly feel your constant need of Christ's mediation, and thence indulge a pleasing hope, that you should not pray in vain. These exercises, introductory to secret prayer, would have the happiest tendency to detach your minds from all evil and trifling objects, to prevent the intrusion of vain imaginations and secular concerns, to fix your attention, and to elevate your affections and desires from earth to heaven.

Habitual watchfulness over your spirit and conduct is absolutely necessary. The heart must be kept with all diligence. It behoves you to guard against the predominance of those dispositions, the ascendancy of those corruptions, the influence of those temptations, to which you feel that you are most exposed, and by which your devotional exercises have been often obstructed. Would you have those hindrances, so fatal to your peace and progress, removed, and their recurrence prevented, *ponder the path of your feet, that all your ways may be established: turn not to the right hand nor to the left: be circumspect in all things. Walk in wisdom towards them that are without, redeeming the time.* Let it be your constant care to maintain a tender conscience, and an uniform deference to its dictates, exercising yourselves, to keep it, as far as possible, *void of offence towards God and towards man.* Let your words and conduct both plainly evince your practical regard to *whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report; and the God of peace shall be with you.*

But while we address you thus, we do not forget, nor would we have you for a moment to forget, that in order to such a com-

compliance with these exhortations, as shall be conducive to your own good, and the divine glory, the spirit and conduct we have recommended, must be connected with *humble dependance on the Spirit of God*, since they can result from his gracious operations only. Earnestly implore, therefore, the seasonable and effectual aids of this divine Agent, who is *the spirit of grace and supplication;* in whose sacred influences all genuine devotion originates; he alone can implant and cherish those heavenly principles which form the basis of it; he alone can impress your minds with the evil attending the various hindrances that impede its exercise, and make successful the means you employ for their removal. Beware, then, of *grieving the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;* and if you humbly hope, that you are made partakers of his sacred influences, rely solely on these, to prepare you for *every good word and work*, while you diligently use all the means divinely enjoined.

We only add, that *frequency and perseverance in the duties of the closet*, will have the happiest tendency to counteract the effect of every obstacle you meet in their performance, and to render them generally pleasant and beneficial. If you but seldom engage in them, the hindrances will be greatly multiplied and strengthened; whereas, by *continuing instant in prayer*, you will find them gradually diminished and overcome. Thus *waiting on the Lord, you shall renew your strength.* Hence the Apostolic exhortations; *Pray without ceasing. Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; praying always with all prayer, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.* Our Lord spake a parable to this end, *that men ought always to pray, and not to faint*, and enforced this direction by his own habitual practice, leaving you in this, as in all other respects, *an example, that you should follow his steps.*

This address will probably fall into the hands of some, who are utterly disinclined to all devotional exercises. Compassion for your immortal souls prompts us to call upon you to reflect on your deplorable and alarming situation. You are *without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world. Thinkest thou this, O man, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?* Canst thou imagine, that he is an indifferent spectator of thy contemptuous disregard of him?

Or

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God urgeth thee to repentance? Yet a little while, and you will have irrecoverably passed beyond the precincts of mercy, into a world where righteous vengeance will eternally perpetuate the horrors of aggravated despair. *To day*, then, *if ye will hear* the voice of mercy, *harden not your hearts. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.*

It is more than probable, that these lines will meet the eye of the hypocritical professor, who is conscious that he is a total stranger to all the pleasures and advantages of secret devotion, although he may occasionally force upon himself the formal observance of it. What avail all thy pretences to religion, when, at the same time, *thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God?* Eluding, it may be, the strictest observation of human scrutiny, remember, that thine omniscient Judge, *whose eyes are as a flame of fire, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart*, perceives, that *thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. He will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil;* and will then appoint *thy portion with hypocrites, where shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.*

But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, in general, *and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak;* yet suffer us to say, that we fear some of you are criminally remiss in the important, delightful duties of the closet. We cannot but observe, with pain, declensions in the church of Christ; these evidently result from the decline of personal religion: and to what must this be chiefly attributed, but to the numerous impediments to secret devotion, and to the prevalent neglect of the means best adapted to remove them? Hence it is that we see few comparatively, who evince that humble, active zeal in the service of Christ, powerfully urged by their infinite obligations to his dying love. Let not our advice, therefore, affectionately designed to augment your regard to what is so favourable, so essential, both to your personal piety, and general usefulness, be thrown aside after its first perusal, and forgotten. You will not accuse us of vanity, if we venture to say; preserve THIS ADDRESS, as a memento, in some retired spot sacred to devotion, where it may hereafter serve

serve to remind you of your dangers, your duties, your encouragements, when alone with God, and to revive a sense of your obligations. At those periods especially, pray for *us*. We claim *no dominion over your faith, but* only seek to be *helpers of your joy;* our happiness chiefly lies in your stability and prosperity, and in your being *increased with the whole increase of God. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.* In your abounding more and more in the devotions of the closet, and in these, fervently interceding for the respective churches of Christ to which you belong, and for the church of God in general, we should have a pleasing persuasion, not to say full assurance, that the Spirit of God had thus effectually wrought in you, as a pledge, that *the Lord was about to arise, and have mercy upon Zion; that the time to favour her, yea, the set time was come.* In every social and public service, likewise, would all with peculiar energy unite in the prayer, *God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

T. Coles, *Secretary.*

BREVIATES.

Tuesday Evening, VI. Brother Claypole having prayed, brother E. Smith introduced the business of the Association. The Letters were read—brother Hinton delivered an exhortation grounded on their contents, and brother Coles concluded the service.

Wednesday Morning, half past VI. Assembled for prayer—brethren Kent, Wheeler, Stennett, and Hinton were engaged.

IX. The Circular Letter, drawn up by brother Coles, was read, approved, and ordered to be printed.

XI. Met for public worship—brother Stennet began the service—brother E. Smith prayed—brother James Smith preached from Ps. xxii. 28. *The kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the Governor among the nations*—and brother Hughes of Battersea from 1 Thess. iii. 11. *Now God himself, and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.*—Brother Hinton concluded with prayer.

After dinner, brother Hughes, in a very impressive address, recommended the support of the Eclectic Review, The Protestant Dis-

Dissenters' Grammar School, The Religious Tract Society, and the British and Foreign Bible Society—each of which objects we consider as possessing a strong claim to the patronage of the religious public.

Wednesday Evening, VI. Assembled again for public worship. Brother James Smith prayed — brother Wilkins of Abingdon preached from 2 Cor. v. 14. *The love of Christ constraineth us*—and brother Hughes closed the service.

IX. Ministers and Messengers met.—Resolved, That the state of the associate churches is such as calls for deep humiliation, and that it be most earnestly recommended to our respective congregations to set apart Friday, September 29th, as a day of solemn prayer to God for the revival of religion amongst ourselves, as well as for the general interests of our country and of mankind.

Brother James Smith was requested to prepare the next Circular Letter—the subject, *Religious Declension.*

Thursday Morning, X. The Ministers assembled for serious conversation, as usual.—The engagements of the Association, which, though on some accounts attended with a considerable degree of sorrow, had yet been highly interesting, were then closed with prayer by brother Taylor.

The next Association to be held at Blockley and Campden, on Tuesday and Wednesday in the Whitsun-week. The services will commence at Blockley on Tuesday at 3 o'clock, when the letters from the churches will be read—public service at Campden on Wednesday forenoon—brother Hinton to preach; in case of failure, brother Coles.—A second preacher is chosen by the Church where the Association is held.

*** *Put up at the George, Campden.*

STATE OF THE CHURCHES IN THIS ASSOCIATION.

Received on a profession of faith....	22	Dismissed.....	3
		Dead.....	13
		Excluded.....	7
			23

Decrease 1.

The Western Association, containing 52 Churches, was held at Yeovil, Somerset. Added, in the last year, 376—decreased, 144—clear increase, 232.

The Midland Association, containing 22 Churches, was held at Birmingham. Added, 101—decreased, 62—clear increase, 39.

[*Bartlett, Printer, Oxford.*]